Extreme left: The exquisitely carved 16th century sculpture, probably created during the reign of the Gond kings of Nagpur, is an enchanting remnant of an ancient culture.

Left: A masterfully sculpted 13th century image of Mahavir, excavated in Jabalpur, stands in the corridor of the main building of Nagpur Raj Bhavan.

Right: The Jain Tirthankar sculpture that dates back to the 15th century.

Extreme right: An excavated sculpture of a tribal dholak player which dates back to between the 16th and 17th century.
The Nagpur Raj Bhavan is located within a forested plateau in the heart of the city and is brimming with a fascinating mix of flora and fauna.

A biodiversity park was created on the huge expanse of the Nagpur Raj Bhavan in 2011, by weeding out unwanted species and planting newer ones. The flora ranges from roses, aromatic plants and medicinal plants to cacti, sacred plants, ornamental Bambusetum and a large number of native species, weaving a tapestry of dense green foliage. The fauna encompasses a large variety of butterflies and birds. A garden has been created as part of the biodiversity park to attract and retain butterflies. However, birds definitely rule the roost over here — with a staggering 139 species of them at the last count. There are nearly 50 peacocks strutting within the Raj Bhavan premises.

The following chapter takes us on a mesmerising journey of nature in the Nagpur Raj Bhavan.
A scenic, cool path through the biodiversity park.

The silk floss (Ceiba speciosa) stands tall amidst trimmed grass and shrubberies in one of the many gardens at Raj Bhavan.
Extreme left: The akkalkadha or Spilanthes acmella's flowers are a great antidote for toothache and are often used as an aphrodisiac.

Left: There are several vibrant species of flowers in the tranquil gardens of the Raj Bhavan, splashing the surrounding greenery in a burst of glorious colour. The exquisite landscaping of the Raj Bhavan property is captured through colourful vegetation moulded perfectly into the shape of a butterfly.
The plants in the cactus gardens of the Raj Bhavan are elaborately arranged for aesthetic effect.

The tranquil waters of a lotus pond evoke an atmosphere of picturesque serenity in the butterfly garden.
Birds like the sleek Rufous Treepie are a common sight around the Raj Bhavan grounds.

© Ramesh Yewale

Extreme left: Seen here enjoying a midday meal, the robust Bee-eater from the Meropidae family is a voracious insectivore.

© Ramesh Yewale

Left: A lone specimen of the White-throated Kingfisher sits pensively on a tree in the biodiversity park of the Raj Bhavan.

© Ramesh Yewale
To escape the humid monsoons of Bombay as well as for political expediency, Governor Elphinstone suggested that an administrator’s seat be established in Pune. Thus, the institution of a Governor’s residence in Pune was set in motion. The first proper residence for the Governor of Bombay in Pune was purchased by Sir John Malcom from Major Ford C.B. amidst the greenery of Dhapoor in 1828. But due to financial and political reasons, the estate was sold in 1864.

Almost seven years later, plans to construct a grander Government House were put in place. The chosen locale of the new structure was Ganeshkhind, which was closer to the cantonment area.

After Independence, a large part of the estate, including the Governor’s office and residence, was given over to the newly formed Pune University. An existing property was refurbished to serve as the Governor’s residence. Today, it is known as the Pune Raj Bhavan.

While Punya Bhushan is used as the Governor’s residence, Punya Laxan serves as the presidential suite. Punya Chintan houses a small conference hall and guest rooms. A new guest house for VIPs has been constructed adjacent to the second gate of Pune Raj Bhavan.
Originally built in 1888 to serve as a guest house, Punya Bhushan is now the Governor’s official residence within the premises of Pune Raj Bhavan. With modern modifications it now comprises three bedrooms, three study rooms, a dining room, a drawing room and the Governor’s office.

Punya Laxan was built in 1906, originally as a service facility for the Secretary’s quarters. It has been beautifully renovated as a presidential suite for the VVIP guests of the State. Most of the original architecture has been restored in favour of modern transformations. Punya Chintan used to be known as Bodyguard House during the British rule. In present times it has been suitably restructured to serve as a guest house.
Left: The Governor’s office in Punya Bhushan.
Right: The grand central drawing room within Punjab Laxan, also referred to as the presidential suite.
Interesting artefacts and pieces of art can be found within the premises of the Raj Bhavan in Pune and have been well-maintained. Across the property we come across small objects that have huge significance such as the Sinhalese bell, the stone baithak and many more.

A cast-iron cannon from the pre-Independence era stands outside Punya Bhushan.
A beautifully sculpted stone elephant (baithak) positioned on the pathway between Punya Bhushan and Punya Laxan.

A Sinhalese bell with a long inscription on the upper half stands on a tripod in the garden area outside Punya Bhushan.

Left: A metallic sculpture of the Queen’s crown from the British era.
Gardens, pathways and lawns are carefully maintained to capture the imagination and delight the senses of the visitors and the residents alike. Planned vegetation areas and artistically structured gardens lure in a variety of birds and insects too. Colourful butterflies are a common sight within the Raj Bhavan premises.

The following chapter provides glimpses of nature within the Pune Raj Bhavan complex.
Left: Varieties of roses beautify the secluded Rose Garden within the Raj Bhavan premises.
Right: The rare exotic Pentas flowers are a sight to behold.
Extreme right: Wild flowers, such as the cock's comb, are a common sight in the well-kept gardens of Pune Raj Bhavan.
Left: The flora within the Raj Bhavan premises have been planned such that there is scope for all types of flowers, including carnations.

Right: A Chinese evergreen shrub beautifies the garden outside Punya Laxan.
Distinguished by the tranquil beauty of the countryside, the Governor’s House at Mahabaleshwar, earlier known as The Terraces and rechristened as Giri Darshan, is a relatively small building nestled in the midst of a forest. It is an ideal set-up to enjoy the beauty of the Sahyadri Hills. The Terraces was purchased in 1884. Lying snug in the heart of the Sahyadri Hills, this property is divided into two houses: Giri Darshan, the Governor’s personal residence and Giri Laxan, where the guests of the Governor are lodged.

The picturesque region of Mahabaleshwar had always been a source of great attraction to the Imperial Rule. It was no surprise when, back in 1826, the need for a respite from Bombay’s humid climate combined with a natural love for the countryside drew Governor Mountstuart Elphinstone’s attention to the cool comforts of Mahabaleshwar as a possible location for a new Government House. Over the years, however, the distance from Bombay and a number of other parameters resulted in the reconsideration of the property at Mahabaleshwar as a summer residence for the Governor.

It is remarkable to note that the tradition of more than a century ago still stands strong in this day and age. Today, the Raj Bhavan property continues to serve as a getaway for the Governor of Maharashtra, who resides in Mahabaleshwar for a few days during summer when he attends public functions and pays visits to neighbouring regions to monitor the progress of various development projects.
Scenic Mahabaleshwar has been the favoured site for numerous buildings designated to be summer residences of the Governor of Bombay. Of these, the house and grounds of what was formerly known as Bella Vista, purchased by the Government of Bombay in 1878, was the first.

The present Raj Bhavan establishment consists of two main houses, surrounded by service quarters, coach houses and stables. Both houses evoke a classic colonial look and feel, reminiscent of their predominantly British heritage.
Left: Framed by the countryside and set against the backdrop of Mahabaleshwar’s calm and serene setting, Gir Laxan serves as the residence for the Governor during hot summers. Right: The cobblestone pathway leading out of Gir Laxan, flanked on either side by lush plant foliage, provides a glimpse into the simple yet striking architecture of colonial times. Extreme right: The Darbar Hall is a separate structure from the other residences, providing a unique view of the landscape.
Home to one of the few remaining evergreen forests of the world, the lush green foliage of Mahabaleshwar is teeming with a rich variety of flora and fauna. The Raj Bhavan property consequently abounds with a vast range of commercial and medicinal herbs, wildlife, fruit and vegetable plantations and more.

The plant and animal life in the neighbouring forest of the Governor’s summer residence in Mahabaleshwar is a magnificent spectacle of nature. The diversity of wildlife in the region is staggering. The surrounding greenery is lush with plantations of strawberries, raspberries, red potatoes, French beans, carrots and several varieties of fruits and vegetables.

The following chapter takes us into the heart of the environment of the Governor’s Mahabaleshwar residence to discover a veritable treasure trove of biodiversity hidden within.
The residences are sprinkled with countless wild species of plants, earning Mahabaleshwar its rightful identity as a hub of biodiversity.
The Raj Bhavans of Maharashtra have some very interesting and intriguing features that are seldom heard about. This chapter offers glimpses of the old Government Houses and other little-known facts about the institution of the Raj Bhavan of Maharashtra.

LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS

The Devi Temple in Raj Bhavan is dedicated to a goddess who is referred to by various names — Sri Gundi, Sagar Mata (Mother of the Sea), and Sakalaai Devi (Mother of all).
The history of the Raj Bhavan begins within the walls of the Bombay Castle that once housed the famous Manor House, which served as the political and administrative headquarters of British power in Western India. The Portuguese Gate of the castle is now a part of the Naval establishment, INS Angre.

Now known as the Haffkine Institute, this site was once the celebrated Parel House, an important link in the chain of Government Houses.
The pet cemetery, was built as a memorial to the pets of the Governors who have lived within the Raj Bhavan.
The All Saints’ Church in Khadki, Pune, still holds pews marked with brass plaques reserving them for the Governor of Maharashtra and the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief. The pews also have slots to rest rifles.

The Government House at Ganeshkhind in Pune used to be the Governor’s residence during the pre-Independence era. Post Independence, it was handed over to the University of Pune as their headquarters.
The halls and lawns of the Raj Bhavans of Maharashtra have had the honour of hosting a number of dignitaries. Within the four walls of the bhavans, several important decisions have been made and some hearty laughs shared by figures who have contributed to history.

The following chapter is a collection of a few memorable moments in the history of Maharashtra, glimpses of the ‘At Home’ reception hosted by the Governor and protocol practices observed in respect of the Governor.
Left: Governor Sankaranarayanan leads dignitaries into the Republic Day ‘At Home’ reception with his wife Radha and Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan.

Below: Prithviraj Chavan entertaining the State’s guests on Republic Day.

Above: President emeritus, Smt. Pratibha Patil hosted a high tea at the Mumbai Raj Bhavan to honour the Indian Cricket Team a day after it won the ICC World Cup in 2011. © Arun Kulkarni

Right: The ceremonial lowering of the National Flag at Raj Bhavan, which takes place at sunset every evening.
Left: The first Indian Governor of Bombay, Raja Maharaj Singh, being administered the Oath of Office by the Hon’ble Shri M.C. Chagla, C.J. on January 6, 1948.
© The Times of India Group.
Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved
Below: The first Chief Minister of Maharashtra YB Chavan taking oath from the then Governor of Maharashtra, Sri Prakasa on May 1, 1960 at Sachivalaya.
© DGIPR, Maharashtra
Right and above: Governor Sankaranarayanan accepting the guard of honour on his arrival at the Nagpur Raj Bhavan.
“... amongst the most charming spots, however, is the bold promontory, known as Malabar Point, and crowned with a mansion, originally the residence of Sir John Malcolm, now set apart for the accommodation of the Governor, when the heat becomes oppressive at Porli. This agreeable resort pitched upon the tall and rocky headland, like an eyrie above the waves commands a varied and extensive view, lovely at all times, but more particularly so when the sun’s broad golden disc is half obscured below the azure waters, and the feathery tips of the coconut woods retain their amber-tinted hues ...”

– Description of Raj Bhavan by a 19th Century traveler, Mrs. Postans.

“Maharashtra Raj Bhavan is one of the most beautiful Raj Bhavans in India. You can see the sunrise; you can see the sunset. It is spectacular. And then it's covered from three sides by the sea.”